

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Gunnison Field Office
210 West Spencer Street
Gunnison, CO 81230**

**SW Gunnison Bark Beetle Salvage
Environmental Assessment**

Decision Record

DOI-BLM-CO-S060-2015-0004 EA

March 2016



Introduction

The Gunnison Field Office (GFO) of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has proposed the SW Gunnison Bark Beetle Salvage Project, for which it prepared a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that was released for public review in June 2015. The Draft EA described the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and a no action alternative for salvage of dead and dying spruce and associated activities. Following the review period, minor modifications were made to the proposed action and analysis of effects based on public comments. The Final EA, which includes these changes along with the public's comments and the BLM's responses, was completed in March 2016. This document reports my decision and the reasons I have made this decision, lists the alternatives considered, describes the public involvement process, makes findings required by other laws and regulations, and describes protest and appeal opportunities.

Decision

It is my decision to implement Alternative B – Proposed Action as described in Section 2.1.2 in the Final EA. All of the project design standards described in Section 2.1.3 in the Final EA, including monitoring described in Section 2.1.3.3, will be implemented as part of Alternative B. I made this decision following and based upon my review of the Final EA, the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (attached to this document), supporting materials referenced by the Final EA, additional information contained in the administrative record, public comments on the Draft EA, and the responses to the public comments (Appendix C in the Final EA).

Rationale

The Final EA considered two alternatives in detail: No Action (Section 2.1.1) and the Proposed Action (Section 2.1.2). I chose to authorize the Proposed Action because it meets the purpose and need for the project:

“The purpose of the SW Gunnison Bark Beetle Salvage Project is to reduce the threat to public safety and infrastructure posed by beetle-killed trees in travel corridors and other high-risk areas, provide for resilient forests and diverse wildlife habitats, and reduce the risk of severe wildfires and subsequent erosion and watershed damage. Removing and using many of the dead trees, while minimizing adverse effects to other resources, can accomplish this purpose. The need for the proposed project is driven by the epidemic levels of spruce beetle infestation in the project area.” (Final EA, Section 1.3).

The Proposed Action would meet this purpose and need by conducting salvage harvest on the 8,700 acres proposed for treatment. It would reduce the risk to public safety and infrastructure by removing many of the dead and dying trees. It would also reduce the risk of severe wildfire by removing much of the accumulated fuel in the treated areas. The use of project design standards would minimize adverse effects to other resources, achieving a balance between the effects of the project and the risks posed by the current insect epidemic.

I did not choose the No Action Alternative because it does not meet the purpose and need for the project. It would not reduce the risk to public health and safety posed by extensive areas of beetle-killed trees, nor would it reduce the risk of severe wildfires and subsequent erosion and watershed damage.

Public Involvement

The BLM actively involved the public throughout the planning process for this project. Issues and concerns are identified through the scoping process. A public scoping announcement was prepared and mailed on December 22, 2014, requesting that public input be provided by January 30, 2015. The mailing list consisted of 188 unique addresses including representatives of federal, tribal, state, and local governments; colleges and universities; media; interested groups and individuals; nearby landowners; and grazing permittees. Supporting information, including four maps, was posted to the GFO web site. Two responses were received from the public, generating 16 distinct comments. As part of the scoping process, the BLM also generated comments internally. The results of the scoping process were compiled in the March 2015 Scoping Summary, which is located in the administrative record.

A public comment period began with release of the Draft EA and notification of interested parties in June 2015. The mailing list consisted of 189 unique addresses, the same that were used for scoping and one additional interested party identified during development of the Draft EA. A 30-day comment period was provided, ending in July 2015. Four comment letters were received during the public comment period. Each comment letter was reviewed by the IDT. The IDT then developed responses to all substantive comments. In some cases, the comments led to minor revisions to the Draft EA, which are reflected in the Final EA. The comment content analysis and comment responses have been placed in an appendix in the Final EA.

Compliance with Laws, Regulation, and Policy

This decision complies with the Gunnison Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1993), as summarized in Section 1.5 of the Final EA and described in detail in the applicable resource sections in Chapter 3 of the Final EA. This decision complies with other major laws designed to minimize environmental effects to public lands, including: Clean Air Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.); Clean Water Act, as amended (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.); Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.); Federal Land Policy and Management Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.); Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended (16 U.S.C. 703 et seq.); Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.); and National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Protest/Appeals

A protest of this forest management decision may be made within 15 days of the publication of notice of this decision, in accordance with 43 CFR 5003.3. Protests must be filed with the Authorized Officer and must contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision. Protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the notice of decision will not be considered. Upon timely filing of a protest, the Authorized Officer will reconsider the decision in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available to him. The Authorized Officer will, at the conclusion of his review, notify the protesting party of his decision in writing.

Following the 15-day protest period, any person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision of the Authorized Officer may appeal the decision for the purpose of a hearing before an administrative law judge at the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR Subpart E. The appeal period runs for 30 days, ending 45 days after the publication of notice of the decision. The appeal shall clearly and concisely state the reason(s) why the appellant thinks the final decision of the Authorized Officer is wrong. An appellant may also petition for a stay of the final decision pending appeal by filing a petition for stay along with the appeal within 45 days after

the publication of the notice of decision. Appeal and stay procedures, and addresses for filing, are outlined on BLM form CO-050-1840-191 (attached).

Implementation Schedule

Pursuant to 36 CFR 4.21, if no appeal is filed within the 30-day time period, implementation of this decision may occur immediately at the close of the appeal-filing period. If an appeal is received along with a request for stay of decision, the decision does not go into effect for an addition 45 days, or until the Office of Hearings and Appeals denies the petition, whichever is first. Communications received in response to this notice, including personal identifying information, will be considered part of the public record for this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

Signature of Authorized Official



Elijah Waters, Field Manager

Gunnison Field Office
Bureau of Land Management

Authorized Officer

3/24/16
Date